Battle of Jiddin 1948: The Arab Liberation Army's First Battle in Palestine



The Battle of Jiddin was the first battle fought by the Arab Liberation Army in Palestine. It began on the night of 21–22 January 1948 and lasted until 23 January, when the Second Yarmouk Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Adib al-Shishakli attacked the settlement of Yehiam, built only weeks earlier on the lands of the village of Khirbat Jiddin near Tarshiha in western Galilee. [1][2][3]

The attack aimed to tie down Zionist forces while the First Yarmouk Battalion crossed into Palestine. The attackers seized the settlement’s forward positions and foiled the supply convoys’ attempts to break the siege, until a British force arrived to relieve it and they withdrew on orders to avoid clashing with it. Eighteen fighters

were martyred, the first martyrs of the Arab Liberation Army on Palestinian soil. [1][2]

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At a glance

Item	Details
Date	Night of 21–22 January 1948, until 23 January
Place	The Yehiam settlement on Khirbat Jiddin’s land, near Tarshiha, Acre district
Arab force	The Second Yarmouk Battalion of the Arab Liberation Army
Commander	Lieutenant Colonel Adib al-Shishakli
Enemy	Yehiam’s settlers and Zionist supply convoys, then a British force
Aim	To tie down Zionist forces while the First Yarmouk Battalion crossed, and to gather intelligence on the settlements’ defences
Martyrs	18, the first martyrs of the Arab Liberation Army
Outcome	Forward positions taken, then withdrawal on orders after British relief arrived

Sources: [1][2][3]

Khirbat Jiddin and its fortress

Khirbat Jiddin was a Palestinian village in the Acre district, about 16 kilometres from the city, built around a fortress on a hilltop overlooking the Mediterranean to the west. The Crusaders built the fortress in the late twelfth century, Muslim armies destroyed it in 1288, and Zahir al-Umar restored it in the eighteenth century; the Arab al-Suwaytat lived among its ruins until 1948. [3]

The village had about 1,500 inhabitants in 1945. In November 1947, the month of the partition resolution, the settlement of Yehiam was built on the village's land north of the fortress, becoming a spearhead of settlement in the heart of Arab western Galilee. [3]

Background: the Arab Liberation Army enters

The Arab League formed the Arab Liberation Army in December 1947 under Fawzi al-Qawuqji, following a meeting of its council in Lebanon that October; it was at first called the "Army of Liberation." Its battalions began entering Palestine in January 1948. [1]

The Second Yarmouk Battalion under Adib al-Shishakli moved from the Qatana camp in Syria to Bint Jbeil in south Lebanon and from there into Galilee, while the First Yarmouk Battalion prepared to cross into the Jenin–Beisan area, entering Palestine on 22 January 1948. Al-Shishakli received a telegram from the Liberation Army command asking him to attack a settlement to cover the First Battalion's crossing and to gather intelligence on the settlements' defences, and he chose the Jiddin settlement. [1][2]

The course of the battle

On the night of 21–22 January 1948 the fighters of the Second Yarmouk Battalion attacked the settlement. The settlers put up stubborn resistance, but the attackers managed to take its forward positions and tighten the siege around it. [1][2]

Zionist supply convoys tried to break the siege but failed, and the relief columns suffered a number of dead and wounded. [2][1]

On 23 January a British force reached the settlement to relieve it, and the Yarmouk forces withdrew on their command’s orders to avoid a clash with the British. [2]

Results

Eighteen fighters of the Yarmouk Battalion were martyred at Jiddin, the first martyrs of the Arab Liberation Army in Palestine; the available Arab sources do not give the settlers’ losses. The battle achieved its aim of tying down Zionist forces, and the First Yarmouk Battalion crossed into Palestine on 22 January and took up positions in the Jenin–Beisan area. [2][1]

The battle showed once again that British forces, despite their claimed neutrality, stepped in to protect Zionist settlements whenever they came under threat. [2]

The fate of Khirbat Jiddin

Khirbat Jiddin later came under bombardment and attack by the Sheva’ and Carmeli brigades, and it was probably occupied after the fall of neighbouring Amqa on 10–11 July 1948 during Operation Dekel; its people were scattered as refugees. The fortress still stands, and the occupation authorities have turned it into a tourist site. [3]

Read also: The Arab Liberation Army.

Differences between the accounts

The sources differ on some details. The Al Jazeera Encyclopedia says it was the Second Yarmouk Battalion under al-Shishakli that attacked the settlement to cover the First Battalion’s crossing, while the WAFA file credits al-Shishakli with the First Battalion and makes the attack a cover for the Second’s crossing; we have followed Al Jazeera, which fits the Second Battalion’s route through south Lebanon

into Galilee. WAFA dates the battle to 22–23 January and Al Jazeera to the night of 21–22 January, and the WAFA text places the settlement “in Hebron” (al-Khalil), most likely a typo for Galilee (al-Jalil). [1][2]

Timeline

Date	Event
November 1947	The Yehiam settlement is built on Khirbat Jiddin’s land [3]
December 1947	The Arab League forms the Arab Liberation Army under Fawzi al-Qawuqji [1]
Night of 21–22 January 1948	The Second Yarmouk Battalion attacks the Jiddin settlement [1]
22 January 1948	The First Yarmouk Battalion crosses into the Jenin–Beisan area [1]
23 January 1948	A British force relieves the settlement; the Yarmouk forces withdraw [2]
July 1948	Khirbat Jiddin probably occupied after the fall of Amqa in Operation Dekel [3]

Frequently asked questions about the Battle of Jiddin

When was the Battle of Jiddin?

On the night of 21–22 January 1948, lasting until 23 January. [1][2]

Where is Jiddin?

Khirbat Jiddin was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Acre district near Tarshiha, centred on the historic Jiddin fortress. [3]

Who led the battle?

Lieutenant Colonel Adib al-Shishakli, commander of the Arab Liberation Army’s

Second Yarmouk Battalion. [1]

Why did the Liberation Army attack Jiddin?

To tie down Zionist forces while the First Yarmouk Battalion crossed into Palestine, and to gather intelligence on the settlements' defences. [1][2]

How many were martyred?

Eighteen fighters of the Yarmouk Battalion, the first martyrs of the Arab Liberation Army in Palestine. [2]

Why did the attackers withdraw?

A British force arrived to relieve the settlement on 23 January, and they withdrew on orders to avoid clashing with it. [2]

Read also on Palestinuna

- The Arab Liberation Army
- The fall of Acre, 1948
- Depopulated villages
- Battles archive

Sources and references

1. "The Arab Liberation Army: When the Regimes Failed to Confront the Zionist Gangs in Palestine," Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 9 August 2024 (in Arabic).
2. WAFA – Palestinian National Information Centre, "Battles of the Nakba": "The Battle of Jiddin" (in Arabic).
3. Institute for Palestine Studies – Interactive Encyclopedia, "Khirbat Jiddin," from Walid Khalidi, All That Remains.